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SUBJECT: ABYEI REVISITED - POWER VACUUM REMAINS

REF: a) Khartoum 2138, b) Khartoum 2140

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Summary and Comment

¶1. This is the second of two cables prepared by a USAID team that visited South Kordofan State and Abyei from February 17 to March 8, 2006. The purpose of the mission was to a) monitor USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) programs, b) assess the returns process, c) examine protection issues, d) examine the humanitarian and transition issues, and e) identify potential additional areas of assistance to facilitate realization of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

¶2. Per Ref B, it is clear that local and returnee populations in Abyei continue to have unrealistically high expectations of support from the international community. The inability of these populations to see peace dividends is resulting in increasing levels of frustration, which could upset the process of normalization engendered by the CPA. The approaching rainy season and resulting difficulty of movement is likely to exacerbate tensions and frustrations. A humanitarian crisis stemming from poor hygiene conditions, coupled with an absence of services, is very likely during the rains.

¶3. In addition to the previous recommendations (Ref B) the team recommends additional interventions to reduce and mitigate tensions between the Misseriya and Dinka populations and address the frustration of the local communities towards the international community. Such interventions should include: increasing awareness of nomad migration routes and movements; livelihood support involving water catchments and storage containers; assistance for milling cereals; conflict resolution through support to family tracing and unification initiatives; and civil society engagement in the implementation of the Abyei protocol. It is critical to implement the humanitarian interventions before the advent of the rainy season in order to reduce frustrations and demonstrate some peace dividends before

movement becomes difficult, if not impossible. End summary and comment.

Background

¶4. A USAID team of staff from the USAID/Khartoum and USAID/Washington visited Abyei from March 5 - 8, 2006, to review the humanitarian and transition situation and to identify critical interventions in advance of the rainy season. The team's work should be seen in the context of the recently drafted USAID Sudan strategy, which emphasizes assistance to the three areas, especially in supporting the implementation of the CPA, standing up of state governments, and assistance to returnees.

¶5. The political situation remains as reported previously (Ref B). There continues to be little progress on implementation of the Abyei protocol. Confusion over the location of authority continues. The U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) indicated that the two parties could not agree on the modalities for implementation of the protocol. This has resulted in a lack of services to the local community and a focus on meeting daily needs rather than addressing larger issues.

¶6. Local police forces are cee. a2aated\$ but0thejrQ cpaciI\$){#|ilis|l b in?zmi`}>{j(NovkmwlQoD|Q};QM4QHWQther logistical support, as well as basic supplies such as stationery to facilitate the work of local police. The police force in Abyei is not integrated, a factor that could affect the force's ability to work credibly in some areas.

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¶7. UNMIS reported that despite tensions between the Misseriya nomads and Dinka, no incidents of violence have occurred in the Abyei area of responsibility. There is concern that when the Misseriya and other nomadic groups begin northward migration after the rainy season begins in May, tensions could flare.

¶8. A checkpoint has been established immediately north of Abyei town. It is not possible to proceed beyond this checkpoint without obtaining a permit from the National Security office in Abyei. UNMIS has been unable to travel north of the town for several weeks because of a decision to not apply for the permit (Note: Under the Status of Forces Agreement between the U.N. and the GNU, the U.N. should not have to apply for permits. End note.) Monitoring of the CPA has not occurred north of the checkpoint for some time. UNMIS was unable to monitor troop movements north of town, and therefore was unable to fulfill its mandate until after an altercation on March 7. This checkpoint has also restricted USAID partners' humanitarian access north of Abyei.

Returns - Desires, Expectations, and Frustrations

¶9. The willingness to return to areas of origin is high. Potential returnees indicated that if they had sufficient funds they would return in spite of a known absence of basic services. Spontaneous returns continue. The Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC) reported that 25,681 people have returned to the Abyei area during the past year. Similarly, UNMIS estimated that 25,000 have returned. UNMIS reports that returns have recently decreased from more than 500 per week to less than 250, noting that it is too soon to know whether this represents a trend. Undoubtedly the absence of organized returns prevents UNMIS from having completely accurate figures; however, the veracity of the SRRC

numbers is also questionable.

¶10. There are approximately 20 emerging villages around Abyei town. The total population of these settlements is approximately 11,000 to 13,000 people. Services in most of these villages are generally lacking.

¶11. Returnees to the Abyei area had been led to believe that services would be in place upon arrival and demanded more assistance. Many returnees sold assets in order to return. This factor combined with the absence of services has increased their vulnerability and potential for abuse and exploitation. UNMIS-Child Protection estimates that more than 200 street children can be found in the Abyei market as a result of returnee families' inability to provide for them. The chairman of the local Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Abyei told the team that he was only a politician and therefore it was the international community's responsibility to provide humanitarian services to the local population.

¶12. One return community consisting of both Dinka and Misseriya in Golai, 27 kilometers north of Abyei, presented the USAID team with a list of needs. The requests included: establishment of a water yard; installation of hand pumps; construction of a permanent hospital/clinic (including free drug provision); creation of a school, and provision of food assistance; livelihoods support (a flour mill and agriculture inputs - seeds, tools, and a tractor); establishment of pit latrines and baths; and sports equipment and uniforms for youth. Authorities have encouraged communities to expect this level of services without considering resource availability, necessary sequencing, or time requirements. Similar expectations were encountered in Rumamer, a Dinka returnee community. This misinformation has contributed to returnees' high level of frustration with the international community's response.

¶13. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees often obtain information about conditions in areas of origin from informal networks. Information about the CPA is very weak in Abyei. The local population in Abyei is

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unaware of the special protocol governing the area and its special status.

¶14. UNMIS radio has not received its license to operate. The U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) is developing radio segments and an information campaign managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to address mine risk awareness, HIV/AIDS, child protection, family reunification services, sexual and gender-based violence, and some general information on the CPA. These UNICEF and IOM information mechanisms are not yet functioning for unclear reasons.

¶15. UNMIS Returns, Reintegration, and Recovery unit (UNMIS RRR) has plans for 28 way stations to be established throughout the south and the transition areas, including outside Abyei town. The way stations will be managed by IOM, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The only two way stations operating currently are in Kostî and Malakal. The absence of a government structure has inhibited land allocation for the Abyei way station. Although the Misseriya object to construction of the way station and perceive it as an attempt to settle Dinka along migratory routes, the way station is necessary as Abyei is a major transit point to the south. With no date set to resolve this issue, an interim measure to support returnees arriving and transiting through Abyei is recommended.

¶16. There is a disturbing absence of awareness, discussion, or reporting on protection issues in the Abyei area. Although Save the Children/US (SC/US) is engaged in child protection issues such as family tracing and reunification, and UNMIS-Child Protection refers cases to SC/US, the USAID/DCHA team was not aware of any dialogue among NGOs regarding broader protection issues.

Humanitarian and Transition Issues

¶17. There is broad consensus that access to water is the primary humanitarian need and significant potential conflict driver. In addition, health, access to free education, and economic and livelihood opportunities beyond mere subsistence may be necessary for returnees.

¶18. Access to water and migratory routes is the primary conflict driver between nomads and local populations. Relations between the communities were complicated during the war due to the nomads' occasional role as Government of Sudan-backed militia. Tensions linger due to abuse and violence that occurred during the war, resulting in denial of access to traditional migratory routes and water. Years of conflict have left many in the local population unaware of nomad migration patterns or movements, facilitating resource and other clashes. In some cases, returnees have spilled over from established communities and created settlements at water points along centuries-old migratory routes. Consequently low-level but sporadic conflicts occur. This ensuing threat to nomad livelihoods combined with frustration from unseen peace dividends is a conflict driver.

¶19. As previously reported, access to water is the key issue in sustaining returns, promoting recovery, and mitigating the potential for conflict. In Abyei, a lack of drilling rigs has severely inhibited construction of the 80 donor-funded boreholes for the area. Limited water resources exacerbate tensions between sedentary and returnee communities and nomadic groups, and generates frustration targeted at the international community. Water access is significantly below SPHERE standards; however, existing donor resources would likely prove insufficient to meet those standards or the expectations of local populations. The confirmation of European Union funding for an NGO consortium and the purchase of a

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drilling rig for SC/US is a welcome development.

¶20. Access to free education was identified as the second priority of return populations. A deficiency of trained educators, lack of a common curriculum due to absence of local government, and the absence of an agreement on the language of instruction present significant obstacles to ensuring quality education. Current programs in former GOS and SPLM/A areas continue in parallel, resulting in duplication of effort, risking fragmentation of the Abyei areas education system, and creating a potential for conflict.

¶21. The population values education highly. The critical issue from a practical and policy perspective is whether or not the curriculum will be taught in Arabic or English. Designation of language(s) of instruction is significant to ensure economic opportunities for all groups of the population and maximize possible linkages to markets in both northern and sub-Saharan Africa. The lack of a government or overarching political framework prevents a determination on the issue. The general population desires access to free education in either

Arabic or English. The largest pool of existing resources for capacity building and delivery is in Arabic, the local lingua franca.

¶22. People also expressed a need for economic and livelihoods recovery. Basic infrastructure is a critical need. Road rehabilitation and construction would facilitate access to services and markets for newly established villages and create needed short-term income-generation activities. Improved road conditions would ease the burden of the tremendous workload that women in the Abyei area face moving to markets, health facilities, or towns.

¶23. In Abyei the combined SRRC/Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) office essentially has dissolved, with only the SRRC component functioning. The Acting Administrator for Abyei accused the SRRC of directing resources to SPLM areas only, at the expense of the general population. Although this claim could not be verified, it appeared that HAC representation on the SRRC/HAC was weak.

¶24. The population in Abyei was generally unaware of the existence of a protocol governing the status of the area. The major reason for this appeared to be the general population's daily occupation with meeting basic needs. The feeling of people familiar with Abyei issues is that pressure is mounting on the presidency to appoint a government. National Security has filled the governance gap in the absence of movement to appoint a government in Abyei. The lack of democratic institutions precludes formalized conflict resolution between Misseriya and Dinka populations. Although to date, traditional mechanisms have reduced tensions and maintained peace, this system is fragile in the absence of a neutral Sudanese arbiter to work with both groups.

Recommendations

¶25. Water catchments and storage facilities: This is particularly urgent in Abyei. Distribution of containers to store water, training in rainwater harvesting, and the establishment of hafirs where possible. These activities should augment USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) -supported water access activities currently underway.

¶26. Health and hygiene awareness: The sanitary situation in town is poor and should be addressed before the onset of the rainy season. Garbage surrounds containers, which are not collected or emptied. General knowledge of basic hygiene and sanitation appear to be absent. There is a high risk of hygiene and sanitation related diseases during the rainy season if measures are not taken immediately to improve the sanitation situation and hygiene awareness.

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¶27. Mapping and rerouting of migratory routes: Ensuring adequate water availability along current migratory routes through negotiation with local communities, augmentation of existing capacity, or establishment of new water points in cases where migratory paths are rerouted to avoid newly domicile populations.

¶28. Distribution of mortars and pestles to returnee populations: This distribution should become a de facto income subsidy and reduce the travel burden on women. Distribution would be the first part of a two-phase milling project. The second phase might involve a potential Global Development Alliance (GDA) partnership

between USAID, a company selling mills and related services, and local communities. USAID would subsidize the cost, with local communities contributing resources to cover the difference between the market and subsidized price. The purchase price should include spare parts and maintenance for one -to two years. Such an approach would promote ownership as well as the local economy. WFP will be importing manual mills (one per village), and the team recommends that this initiative be supported.

¶29. Family tracing and reunification: The peace dividends are immense for families and local communities through the restoration of family and kinship units and the closure this brings to suffering. SC/US implements this program with UNICEF funding. USAID funds could augment and expand SC/US activities.

¶30. Way station: As an interim measure, a temporary way station should be established in Abyei town; however, finding the appropriate implementing partner with spare capacity is challenging. This should be seen as a stop-gap measure until the U.N. way station is functioning.

¶31. Civil society consultation process for implementation of the protocols: Engaging local leaders, NGOs, and communities with information on the protocols and providing an opportunity for input is critical. This would not only improve awareness and understanding of the CPA and protocols, but also enhance ownership of the process by the general population.

STEINFELD